

Carex pleiostachys

COMMON NAMES

Fiordland sedge

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: Sp, DPS, DPT, RR

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Sedges

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Pale green, densely tufted and leafy sedge of coastal slopes, boulder and cobble beaches and cliff faces. **Culms** 100–300 × 0.5–1 mm, terete, glabrous; basal sheaths light brown to reddish brown. **Leaves** distinctly > culms in length, 1–1.5 mm wide, usually concave on the upper surface, often with a obvious median groove, and convex on the underside, margins scabrid with the apices much curled; sheaths rather long, extending for up to ½ the length of the lamina. **Inflorescence** composed of 5–7 spikes, these 10–20 × 4–7 mm. The terminal spike male; remaining spikes female, with occasional male spikes near the base. **Spikes:** uppermost more or less approximate, sessile; lower spikes shortly pedunculate, the lowermost typically set well back and more distant from the others; leaf-like bracts subtending spikes long with distinctly curled apices. **Glumes** (excluding awn) almost equal to or just shorter than utricles, ovate, acute or emarginated, membranous, cream with light brown striae, midrib paler, prolonged as a scabrid awn of varying length. **Utricles** 3–4 × 1 mm, subtrigonous, narrow-lanceolate, green to greenish-brown with white to pale brown nerves, this fading at maturity, margins glabrous; beak tapering gradually, 1–1.5 mm long, crura bifid, glabrous; stipe 0.5 mm long. **Stigmas** 3. **Nut** 2 mm long, dark brown, oblong-obovoid, trigonous.

SIMILAR TAXA

Somewhat similar to *C. comans* Bergg. with which it shares narrow, concavo-convex leaves and short, light coloured spikes. Nevertheless, *C. pleiostachys* differs from *C. comans* by its broader spikelets, and glabrous rather than scabrid-beaked utricles. *Carex pleiostachys* is also superficially similar to *C. fetalis* Hamlin from which it differs by its approximate rather than evenly spaced spikes, and presence of a distinctive utricle beak (virtually absent in *C. fetalis*). In *C. fetalis* the crura is distinctly scabrid while in *C. pleiostachys* it is entirely glabrous.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. South Island, Fiordland coastline only.

HABITAT

Coastal. Said to be a conspicuous species of seal haul outs, and both seal and penguin (rock hopper) colonies. It is known to grow within peaty soil under low shrubs, and on open cobble, and sand beaches. It also colonies cliff faces. It extends well inland up the fiords and has been collected from shingle at various river mouths.



Herbarium specimen: AK 2734. Photographed with permission of Auckland Institute and Museum. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 23/10/2007, Licence: CC BY.



Herbarium specimen: AK 2734. Photographed with permission of Auckland Institute and

THREATS

Because of the remote and hazardous nature of the Fiordland coastline this species is not very well known. Preliminary surveys and past field reports suggest that it is locally abundant along some parts of the coastline. For this reason it is currently viewed as a localised, range restricted species. Further survey to clarify status is desired.

GENUS

Carex

FAMILY

Cyperaceae

AUTHORITY

Carex pleiostachys C.B.Clarke in Cheeseman

SYNONYMS

None

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

Unknown

FRUITING

Unknown

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Nuts surrounded by inflated utricles are dispersed by granivory and wind (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

As far as is known this species has yet to be cultivated. It would probably be easily grown and tolerant of most conditions provided it was planted in a moist soil.

ETYMOLOGY

carex: Latin name for a species of sedge, now applied to the whole group.

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

Key to indigenous and naturalised Carex in New Zealand

NVS CODE

CARPLE

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: RR, Sp

2012 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: RR, Sp

2009 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: DP

2004 | Range Restricted

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Moore LB, Edgar E. 1970. Flora of New Zealand, Volume II. Indigenous Tracheophyta: Monocotyledones except Gramineae. Government Printer, Wellington, NZ. 354 p.

Thorsen MJ, Dickinson KJM, Seddon PJ. 2009. Seed dispersal systems in the New Zealand flora. *Perspectives in Plant Ecology, Evolution and Systematics* 11: 285–309.

ATTRIBUTION

Description adapted from Moore and Edgar (1970)

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MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/carex-pleiostachys/>

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